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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 004228

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/14/2025

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PNAT](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MIXED REACTION BY SUNNI ARABS TO CONSTITUTION AMENDMENTS

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1. (C) An official from the Sunni Arab-dominated Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), Nasir Al-Ani, told PolOff October 13 the IIP remains resolutely in support of the constitution despite insurgents firing rocket-propelled grenades on the IIP office in Fallujah October 13. Al-Ani said there were no casualties in the attack. PolOff commended the IIP for its stance. On October 13 evening IIP spokesman Ayed Samarra'i was on several Arab media outlets defending the IIP change of position and urging support for the constitution. There were reports of bomb threats against the IIP headquarters in Baghdad on October 14. Hayat newspaper October 14 reported the IIP had announced also on October 13 that one of its activists was murdered in Zafraniya by an armed gang. (MNF-I and Embassy personnel met with IIP officials October 13 to discuss security precautions.)

2. (C) Sunni Waqf leader Sheikh Ahmed Abdelghafur Samarra'i released a statement October 13 to "bless and support" Iraqi Islamic Party's (IIP) approval of the constitutional amendments. Samarra'i is in Qatar and unavailable for comment. Despite our repeated requests by telephone this past week; he has refused to go on television in support of the constitution. His son told PolFSN on October 13 that the Sunni Waqf chose to give indirect support for the constitution lest it cause a rift with the Muslim Ulema Council. PolCons urged acting Waqf leader Ibrahim Taha on October 13 to ensure Friday sermons were balanced on the constitution. Taha also demurred, saying that the Waqf's position was well known after its public statement. He added that communications between the headquarters in Baghdad and mosques around the country was not sufficient to alert imams quickly.

3. (U) Senior Muslim Ulema Council official Abd al-Salam al-Kubaisi on October 13 called the constitutional amendments a "conspiracy" by the U.S. to divide Iraq. Meanwhile, the Conference of Iraqi People, led by former Sunni Waqf director Adnan Dulaimi, reiterated its call for Iraqis to vote against the draft constitution "to preserve the nation's unity," according to Hayat newspaper October 14.

4. (C) Iraqi radio stations reported October 13 that ICND spokesman Saleh Mutlaq called upon the IIP to change its stance on their new support for the constitution. Iraqi Council for National Dialogue (ICND) member Sa'adoon al-Zubaidi told PolOff October 13 that the amendments were a "clever ploy" by the TNA to give the appearance of assuaging Sunni demands. But, he continued, no real constitutional changes will occur because Kurdish voters could overturn any proposals by a two-thirds vote in Irbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Dahuk provinces. PolOff countered that the amendments made the constitution more beneficial to all Iraqis.

5. (C) Comment: polls show that the two most influential political forces in the Sunni Arab community are the Muslim Ulema Council and the Iraqi Islamic Party. The last-moment switch in the Iraqi Islamic Party position, and its field offices' ceasing their advocacy against the constitution, should switch some - but not all - Sunni Arab votes to support the constitution on October 15. This turn boosts the likelihood of the constitution passing, but criticism from the harder line Sunni Arab political groups is not likely to fade right away. On October 13 IIP leaders were wondering whether their decision would impede their effort to form a broad Sunni Arab Islamist electoral list for the December elections.

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